

WASHINGTON- Congressman Lee Terry lauded the passage of H.R. 5822, a bill, which appropriates funds for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2011. The legislation, which passed the House on Wednesday contains funding for two significant projects that Congressman Terry has been instrumental in for years.

"It is about time our veterans have access to a VA hospital in Omaha that is worthy of their sacrifices," said Congressman Terry. "The \$56 million included in this bill for the design of a replacement medical facility in Omaha is a great start to providing our veterans with a first-class facility so we can continue to provide exceptional care for them."

"The bill also includes advance planning and land acquisition funds for the new national veteran's cemetery in the Omaha area," said Congressman Terry. "I have diligently worked for many years to help bring a national cemetery to our region and very soon, about 112,000 previously unserved veterans will have a burial option close to home."

According to Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki, the VA will now be preparing a site delineation statement that defines the parameters of the land search in order to maximize access for the greatest numbers of Veterans. VA will advertise for expressions of interest, and conduct environmental assessments, which are required by the National Environmental Policy Act and the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation, and Liability Act. A list of the most suitable sites will then be referred to Sec. Shinseki for a final decision. After location for the cemetery has been approved, the Justice Department will review all aspects of the title transfer and recordation. After all reviews have been completed, VA will begin master planning and initial design of the cemetery. Full design and construction of Phase 1 gravesite development will then be initiated.

Here's what area veterans had to say about today's vote:

"The Omaha VA hospital has been a model for all other veteran hospitals, however the need to have a new one is of vital importance," said Nebraska VFW Commander Sam DeJohn. "The current facility can no longer be upgraded to meet current standards and our veterans deserve a facility that will be able to care for their needs. Funding of a new veterans cemetery in the Omaha area is essential to have a final resting place for the veterans of eastern Nebraska and Western Iowa. This will allow for families to be able to visit a gravesite without having driving hundreds of miles. These are two very important projects."

"It is nice to see the possibility of a new hospital to serve our veterans," said Nebraska Adj. Quarter Master for the Nebraska VFW John Liebsack. "The current facility is tough to maintain and we need a new facility. Area veterans do not have adequate access to a national cemetery in our area. When Congressman Terry first made the announcement about his plans to bring a national cemetery to the area I thought this would be another good service to our veterans."

